



STATE OF MICHIGAN

**Family
Independence
Agency**

235 S. Grand Avenue
PO Box 30037
Lansing, MI 48909
Tel: (517) 373-2035
Fax: (517) 373-8471
www.mfia.state.mi.us

DOUGLAS E. HOWARD, Director

News Release

Contact: Janice Berry
MFIA Office of Communications

Phone: (517) 373-7394

Date: August 17, 2001

FIA Honors Ingham County Woman

LANSING—The director of the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA), Douglas E. Howard, presented the agency's statewide Achiever of the Month Award for Melissa Guggemos of Lansing. The celebration was held on Friday, August 17 at the Capital Area Michigan Works! office in Lansing.

The award was established in 1993 to recognize persons making outstanding progress toward self-sufficiency under Michigan's comprehensive welfare reform initiative *To Strengthen Michigan's Families*. Melissa Guggemos was selected to receive the August award because of her determination to become independent of the welfare system despite significant barriers to her success.

Ms. Guggemos is the single mother of two children. She moved to Michigan in 1992 in search of a better life. When she arrived in Ingham County she experienced some difficulty obtaining employment because of her rheumatoid arthritis. To provide for her family she applied to the Ingham County FIA for public assistance. She received Aid for Dependent Children, now known as the Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits, Medicaid and food stamp benefits to help make ends meet.

(more)



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

Melissa, who is a high school graduate, finally found a job as a medical assistant with Lansing Management. She worked at the company for about 18 months when her position was restructured and she was let go because she did not have the training or education to perform the new duties.

Illness and a lack of job skills made it difficult for Melissa to find employment. Because of her physical disability, caused by her rheumatoid arthritis, she was encouraged by one of her doctor's to apply for Supplemental Security Income benefits rather than go to work. However, Melissa refused to do this because she was determined to support her family.

In 1998, Melissa was referred to the Work First program. With their help she secured part-time employment with the Capital Area Community Services (CACS) Head Start program. In addition, Work First sent her to computer training through Career Quest, which helped her obtain full-time employment with Head Start. Later, she was promoted to a full-time position with the CACS Action Center as a clerk/receptionist. She continues to work there today.

Melissa does not have a driver's license. Her primary modes of transportation are bicycle and bus. When her bicycle needed costly repairs, Work First helped her purchase a new one. They also supplied a monthly bus pass to assist her with transportation to and from work.

Currently, Ms. Guggemos is taking social work classes at Lansing Community College. In the near future she hopes to transfer to Michigan State University.

Melissa's hard work and extraordinary efforts have paid off. Her cash assistance case closed in July 2000. She continues to receive food stamp benefits, day care and transitional Medicaid.

Because she has demonstrated the ability to meet life's challenges and proved that it is possible to succeed against the odds, Melissa Guggemos became the ninety-third Michigan resident to be honored with the Achiever of the Month Award.

###